

Statement of Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri

“Lessons from the Inspectors General: Improving Wartime Contracting”

**The Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan
The Caucus Room, 325 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and all of the commissioners. I think your public service is something that I hope people will be talking about in this room 20, 30 years from now as they go through the history of the investigative and public policy work that's done in this room. I'm very hopeful that this great group of people can put together that kind of historic effort.

I want to thank Susan Collins for being such a soldier for appropriate contracting practices in the government. She has been laboring in these fields long before Jim Webb and I arrived and she should get appropriate recognition for her yeoman's work in this area.

I also want to thank the inspector general community and I want to thank the whistleblowers and I think that those two groups of people should remain in our thoughts and in your work, because there is so much that has been done and can be done on the backs of hours and hours and hours of their laboring in this area.

As I thought about what I was going to say today, I thought a lot about Harry Truman. And let me just tell you, Harry Truman has been rolling in his grave for the last five years. He, in fact, has been in constant motion in his grave. He is astounded that we allowed this problem to get this far out of control.

This has been a massive failure. We have failed our military and we have failed the American people. And a report is not going to be enough. You're going to need a two-by-four.

I'm going to try to channel the plain speaking of Harry Truman today, because I think that's what he would want. You're going to have to do something other than just write out summaries of other reports that have been done, because what is missing in this failure is accountability. People need to remember that a general went to jail after Harry Truman finished his work after World War II. And the problems of contracting and war profiteering in World War II were nothing compared to what we're facing.

Hundreds of billions of dollars have disappeared. Everything has been stolen from money to heavy equipment to guns. And the scandalous part about the guns that we

didn't keep track of is that people in the military will tell you that they are confident that our weapons were stolen, sold and used against our own soldiers.

If we do not find accountability, then really we have added to the problem of wasting taxpayers' money.

Now, I am not saying that you all have been designed or are supposed to go on some kind of witch hunt, as you said, Mr. Chairman. On the other hand, if you don't end up with a clear beacon of accountability going forward, then we haven't accomplished anything.

Contractors have no accountability. Our military leaders have no accountability. As one high ranking military leader in Kuwait said to me, "I wanted three kinds of ice cream in the mess hall. I didn't care what it cost."

The mission was so important to our military leaders and their leadership is so stellar, they didn't see contract oversight as part of their mission. They didn't think it was that important. And that's how this problem grew exponentially and scandalously as this conflict in Iraq continued.

Truth be known, we didn't have the force to do the job and contracting was the shortcut to try to get us there.

If you can come with answers on the accountability question, you will have done yeoman's work for the American people. You will have done something that no one else has been able to do.

Now, I would like to spend must a minute, before I finish, on the bipartisan nature of your group. There are those in Congress that wanted this contracting commission to be a committee of the Congress, made up of Senators or Congressmen or women. There are those that wanted it to be a joint committee between the two houses. There are those that thought it was important that we do that with elected officials.

Senator Webb and I spent a great deal of time talking about that and we wanted desperately this not to be a political exercise. We wanted this to be bipartisan. We wanted this to be about policy. And so we did something that a lot of folks around here told us we were crazy to do. We made it four-four. There's no tie-breaker on your commission.

There are four members that are appointed by Democratic members of Congress and there are four members that are appointed by the other party. I am hopeful that the Republican co-chairman will be appointed soon. I am discouraged that that appointment has not been made yet. This is urgent. This should be important. We need to get the Republican co-chairman in place yesterday.

And as you move forward, with four-four [party membership], then all you've got to do is what's right. None of you run for office. None of you are looking for votes. You can do your work without fear or favor.

You can do what's right and not worry about the political consequences. And that's the pep talk I wanted to come and give you today. You are truly a bipartisan group. Frankly, I don't think you should worry whose toes you step on, whether it's this administration or the last administration or future administrations or four administrations ago.

This should be about fixing this problem. It is too big and too important not to do it.

I know that we all, Republicans and Democrats alike stand ready to help any way we can in your work. I encourage you to have a lot of hearings, not just a few. I encourage you, if you need more time, to ask for it.

Most of all, I encourage you to come out with a report that we can take and implement and make sure that we've made a difference. Because if this is one more report sitting on someone's bookshelf somewhere, then we have failed, also.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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